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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001733

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/30/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY: AKP IN THE PROVINCES - TOP DOWN IS THE
TREND

REF: ANKARA 1437

Classified By: PolCouns Janice G. Weiner, reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) Summary and comment: A series of trips to Turkey's provinces have made it clear that PM Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) has turned into the top-down Erdogan machine. He picked the candidate lists, he set the priorities and the platform. If AKP returns to government, all will be beholden to him. On the provincial side, there is less of a sense of participatory democracy, though in most places they are working to maintain party solidarity, including by flashy Erdogan-led rallies. It is an encore of the "great man", central government control complex that has always plagued Turkish politics. End summary and comment.

12. (C) Erdogan has always been top dog in AKP, even before he had his political ban lifted and replaced Abdullah Gul as prime minister in 2003. Early on, AKP touted its democratic credentials and billed itself as an uncharacteristically Turkish internally democratic big tent party. That has gradually eroded as Erdogan exerted ever-increasing control over party structures and appointments, culminating in this year's candidate lists for the July 22 parliamentary elections. He has studiously moderated the party's profile, cutting MPs who voted "no" on March 1 (2003), trimming back those stemming from the Islamist National View perspective and pruning deadwood elsewhere. He has also parachuted candidates into districts based on who he wants to get elected (as with Mehmet Simsek who tops the list in moderate Gaziantep) or whose district he wants to control (as with the number 1 candidate in Sivas, an Erdogan Istanbul protege who replaced Sivas' own, Deputy PM Abdullatif Sener, to the dismay of locals). In a long-running Turkish tradition, this will give Erdogan solid control over his party; newly elected deputies will know they are beholden to Erdogan and understand the PM will not hesitate to axe them next election period if they do not toe the line.

3.(C) The mirror image of such control is disillusionment, resignation and a drop in enthusiasm at the provincial level, where local AKP organizations feel Erdogan and his cronies ran roughshod over their internal primary system, rejecting candidates they had tabbed as qualified for those preferred by Ankara (as was the case in Van). In Sivas, where the city's own Deputy PM did not make the election lists, purportedly because he disagreed with how they were drawn up,

Sener's photo still graces AKP campaign posters and the locals seem perplexed at why an experienced politician -- and co-founder of AKP -- was given the brush-off. In other places -- often the sub-provinces or poorer areas such as Yozgat, east of Ankara, the local party organization seems grateful for the PM's hand, and those who made the candidate lists are careful to include those who did not, introducing them formally to visitors. In the sub-provinces, Erdogan worship is in full swing.

¶4. (C) This was encapsulated in an Erdogan rally we witnessed in Yozgat on June 28. Preparations were impeccable -- quality soundstage, large screen for those at the back, flags, enormous banners with candidates' pictures and slogans, decorations, music, confetti, balloons (all trucked in). An MC -- and a burning sun -- warmed up the crowd for several hours. When the main act arrived, the crowd was lukewarm on former Justice Minister Cicek and a local AKP candidate, generally (but not universally) polite to FM Gul, but people got to their feet for PM Erdogan. While crowd numbers did not approach the 50,000 AKP organizers were touting (it was a work day, it was hot, and a number of those who attended were clearly spectators vice supporters), there were probably 30,000 in a traditional National Action Party (MHP) stronghold. Gul, who did not connect well with the crowd, focused on how AKP (and he personally) had been the victim in the abortive April presidential election; the PM touted actions taken to make the average working Turk's life easier, and what AKP still planned to do. Finally, Erdogan worked hard to pump them up, western campaign style, to shout out the AKP election slogans, before departing by helicopter for his next rally of the day.

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¶5. (C) In the provinces, AKP candidates and provincial chairmen are unfailingly upbeat and optimistic about the numbers they will gain on July 22. But AKP is starting to look more like an old-style Turkish party than a new, internally democratic one. The party lost one potentially potent calling card with the enormous youth vote: with early elections AKP was not able to offer candidacies to those under 30 (25-29), since that constitutional amendment will not take effect until the fall. AKP's strength has been its base and its volunteer grassroots organizations; these remain committed to AKP and Erdogan. But Erdogan's top-down tactics may dim enthusiasm at the mid-level, and AKP -- along with other parties -- is looking for every vote it can muster.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001778

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/05/2022

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY: THE PRO-KURDISH DTP - ITS ELECTION AND
POST-ELECTION PROSPECTS

REF: ADANA 78

Classified By: PolCouns Janice G. Weiner, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: The largest and most influential pro-Kurdish political party, the Democratic Society Party (DTP), running candidates as independents, seems set to take some two dozen seats in the July 22 parliamentary election. This is enough seats to form a parliamentary group and -- if DTPers stick to their moderate rhetoric -- potentially wield some clout in the new parliament. The DTP, however, has links with the terrorist PKK and it is unclear just how moderate their voice will be. Their candidacies stand in sharp contrast to a rise in PKK violence, which seems aimed at creating further divisions and instability in Turkey's southeast. PM Erdogan has called on DTPers who enter parliament to be responsible political actors, not beholden to a terrorist organization. How DTP acts in parliament will prove a bellwether for openly Kurdish aspirations in Turkey for years to come. End summary.

DTP Endorsing "Independent" Candidates

12. (C) In recent meetings throughout southeastern Turkey, local politicians, journalists and businesspeople told us that DTP-endorsed independent candidates are expected to win up to two dozen seats in Parliament in the July 22 elections. In the region's most populous provinces, Diyarbakir and Van, the party is expected to win a total of eight seats, while winning one or two seats in 10 other southeastern provinces plus in selected regions of western Turkey (reftel). Should they win at least 20 seats, they will have enough to form a formal parliamentary group, entitled to floor time and allowed to present legislative proposals. DTP officials, including party chairman Ahmet Turk, have stressed that their parliamentarians will work to achieve their objectives by working responsibly with other parties and avoiding the type of confrontational stunt -- specifically, insisting on speaking in Kurdish when taking the oath of office -- that landed their predecessors (including Turk himself) in hot water in the early 1990s.

13. (C) PM Erdogan has publicly thrown down the "moderation" gauntlet to DTP, calling on those who enter parliament after the July 22 elections to be responsible political actors. He implied that, should he lead Turkey's next government, that government could work with (though not be in coalition with) the DTP if their aims and behavior are moderate. The PM also made clear that if DTP wants to play a constructive role in parliament, it cannot be beholden to the terrorist PKK. The PM's Justice and Development Party (AKP) believes it can benefit from DTP support within parliament on democratic reforms, but not if the votes are PKK-tainted.

14. (C) That there are links between the DTP and the terrorist PKK is clear. Some noted to us that the DTP has parachuted candidate into districts, which will make them answer to the group that put them there -- a political practice in Turkey

not unique to DTP. In previous meetings with DTP chairman Ahmet Turk, we have urged him unequivocally to condemn PKK violence; he has demurred, saying that while he abhors violence, it would be political suicide for him to issue such a public statement. In indications of Turk's attempt to push the envelope, he condemned the May Ankara bombing; attempted (unsuccessfully) to place some relatively independent Kurdish moderates on the election lists, such as Diyarbakir Bar President Sezgin Tanrikulu, and tried (again, unsuccessfully) to enter an election alliance with two small Kurdish parties, KADEP and HAK-PAR, both untainted by any association with violence. Regarding the still-born election alliance, HAK-PAR chairman Serdac Bucak told us that Kurdish society wants unity, "but the decision was made elsewhere - by the PKK." And with respect to his proposed candidacy, Tanrikulu explained to us that, based on his discussions with the DTP about his candidacy, it was clear they wanted obedient servants, not independent thinkers (also hardly unique among political parties, unless the organization pulling strings is the PKK).

15. (C) But some of the DTP's established figures are not helping to convey a moderate party image. A case in point is

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Diyarbakir mayor Osman Baydemir, under investigation for remarks he made in a recent interview on pro-PKK Roj TV, in which he categorized the PKK as fighters (not terrorists).

PKK Breathing Fire

16. (C) Equally puzzling is the PKK's stepped up activities in recent weeks, further raising the temperature in an already tense region and political race. Many observers are suspicious that the PKK's increased attacks are deliberately intended to provoke stepped up Turkish military activity in the southeast, further aggravating pre-existing cleavages between Turks and Kurds. It is also possible that the PKK, which does not exercise absolute control over DTP, may not want the party to succeed in the political arena, where a group of pro-Kurdish MPs could steal the limelight and media attention, as well as rob the PKK of its primacy on the Kurdish issue.

Comment

17. (C) The July 22 general election remains an opportunity for DTP and Turkey's Kurds. How they choose to play their card -- how brave they are in the face of inevitable PKK pressure -- may determine the voice, or lack thereof, in Turkey of those with Kurdish ethnic aspirations for years to come.

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